

The Rock-cut Excavations at Harchoka discovered by CAPT. W. L. SAMUELLS, when employed as Boundary Commissioner on the Rewah and Chutiá-Nágpúr Frontier, Season 1870-71.—By CAPT. W. L. SAMUELLS, ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER, PACHUMBA, CHORD LINE.

(*With plates VI and IX.*)

On the left bank of the *Muwáhi* or *Muwai* river, which forms the northern boundary of the Chutiá-Nágpúr Tributary State of Cháng-Bhokár, stands the small village of Harchoka.* About a quarter of a mile lower down the river and on the same side, a nallah forms its junction with the *Muwáhi* in an oblique direction so as to form an angle with it of about 34° . Within the tongue of land thus formed lies a bed of coarse-grained granite, the surface of which slopes down to the bed of the *Muwáhi*, above which it rises in its highest part to about 9 or 10 feet. In this rock, at a distance of 37 yards from the point at which the nallah forms its junction with the river, are to be found the remains of a somewhat extensive excavation comprising courts, vestibules, chambers, and shrines.

The following notes, with the aid of the plan accompanying this paper, will, I hope, be found sufficiently clear and explicit to convey a fair idea of the form and peculiarities of this interesting excavation.

The darker coloured portions of the plan represent the solid rock which has been left standing to form the walls and other component parts of the temple. The lighter shade of colour represents those portions where the rock overhead has been left to form a roof; and the uncoloured portions those where the rock has been cut away, leaving them open to the sky.

I shall hereafter particularise the several parts by references to the plan; but I may as well endeavour to give here a general idea of their arrangement and dimensions, and this will perhaps be gained best by following me in an imaginary walk through the excavations.

On proceeding to the north side we descend $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet into the solid rock by a narrow flight of steps and find ourselves in an open

* Long. $81^{\circ} 45' 34''$, Lat. $23^{\circ} 51' 31''$.

passage, $24\frac{1}{2}$ feet long, that leads both right and left. Immediately in front of us is a shrine with a porch ($12' \times 9'$) facing west. Proceeding along the passage to the right we turn the corner of the porch, which is then to our left; and opposite it, on our right hand, stands, what I conjecture may have been, an altar, sanctuary, and dormitory. After passing the porch we enter a court measuring 18 feet by 19 feet, at the western extremity of which is a cell or shrine. In front is the hall or main apartment which may be entered from the court or through a vestibule on our left. The passage and court we have just been through, are both open to the sky. But now we enter the vestibule under a flat roof of solid rock, and at the entrance find a large sculpture of Ganesh cut on the wall in relief. There are two entrances to the hall from this vestibule, and the same number from the court. The hall measures 39 feet by 18 feet, the roof being supported by a double row of pillars, ten in number, at a height of 5 feet 9 inches from the floor. This is the average height of the other roofed portions of the excavation, excepting the cells. There are seven cells leading off from the hall on three of its sides, and in one corner there is a recess which formed a receptacle for idols. The largest cell is 6 feet square and $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet high. Returning to the vestibule by which we entered, we turn to the right, and leaving two small shrines and, what appears to have been a sleeping place, on our left, pass along a passage 16 feet long, and $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet broad, which is open to the sky, like the passage beforementioned. This leads into a court 20 feet long; and near the end we enter from, there stands a porch, with four columns supporting its roof. This porch is not connected with any shrine or cell; and from having a stone bench between the two pillars at the back, was probably a place where people met to sit and converse. From this court we enter a verandah ($25 \text{ feet} \times 8 \text{ feet } 9 \text{ inches}$) closed in front throughout one half its length by the solid rock, the roof of the other half being supported in front by a single pillar. There are five cells opening off from this verandah. This ends our inspection of the interior, and re-entering the court we pass by the stone figures of a pair of bulls, and ascend again to the upper surface by a flight of steps on the east side similar to those by which we entered.

The section drawing represents the temple reconstructed, for it is now almost entirely destroyed, and I doubt if in another fifty years any traces of it will be left. The river just above the temple takes a very sharp bend, in the re-entering angle of which a creek has been formed by the eroding action of the water, (*Vide* Pl. vi.) and from the bank of the river being in this part low and shelving, the river, during the temporary impetuosity of floods, dashes with full velocity into this creek, and sweeping over the bank completely submerges the temple, which, at the highest floods is, throughout its greater portion, about two feet below the surface of the water.

It was a work of considerable time and labour to clear the ruins of the debris that lay within, but when this had been done, it was satisfactory to find that enough remained to enable me to form a very correct idea of what the excavations had been like in their perfect state. As a whole they assume rather an odd form, but this must be attributed to the limited space that was available for the purpose, the cell nearest the river being only nine yards distant from it.

I am inclined to think that these excavations have been made at three distinct periods, and for this reason I have, for distinction's sake, styled the three parts the upper, middle, and lower temples respectively. The lower has all the appearances of being the oldest. None of the columns in that part remain intact, but from the lower portions that remain, they appear to have had no base like those in the hall of the middle temple. The latter is, in my opinion, the latest excavation of the three. The two columns which remain standing in the upper temple are very rudely fashioned. The middle temple on the other hand has a much more finished appearance, the walls of the hall being rubbed quite smooth.

I could find no inscriptions in the lower temple. The inscription marked B was found on the verandah-wall of the upper temple, near the entrance to one of the cells. The inscriptions marked A, C, D, E, F, and G were cut on the hall pillars, only five of which I found standing.

The doorway shown in the section drawing, in which a pair of grotesque looking figures* support the scroll of lotus, stem and flowers, is the only attempt at ornamentation that is to be seen. The other doorways are each set off with a border of plain mouldings.

* These figures were called *Kirttimukh* by the Muharrir mentioned on p. 180.

I found the roof of the upper temple, excepting over the upper cell, in a perfect state, and it was by observing that the edge or eave of the terraced roof had been chiselled off straight, that I was enabled to conclude with certainty that the courts of the temple had been originally made open to the sky just as I found them. This peculiarity of the Harchoka excavation was also apparent from finding a portion of the roof of the porch L projecting from the back wall, whilst on the wall of the open passage at its side, chisel-marks could be traced not only above the level of the projecting fragment but right up to the top of the wall. It was by such aids as these, that in other parts of the temple I could ascertain what portions had been originally left roofed, and what unroofed.

A very intelligent Muharrir who accompanied the chief of Cháng-Bhokár to my camp informed me, that when he had visited this temple on a former occasion, he found a slab of stone lying amongst the debris which bore the inscription "Kirt Mohendres Gopal, Pattan, Sambat, 744, (A. D. 688)." I searched everywhere for this stone but was unable to find it. It is, however, a question whether in this instance the man's imagination and intelligence had not shot ahead of his palæographic attainments and combined to get the better of his veracity, for, though gifted with a smattering of Sanscrit and a good knowledge of Hindi, he was unable to make anything of the inscriptions which I copied. I am therefore inclined to doubt his having deciphered a complete inscription unless the characters were comparatively modern Hindi, in which case it was probably a transliteration on cut stone of one of the original inscriptions on the hall pillars. This supposition, in the event of there being any truth in the man's statement, becomes the more probable when one considers that all the inscriptions which I found were cut on the solid walls and pillars, and that therefore men who obviously engraved their names on such like places with a view to perpetuating their memory were not likely to commit the record of them to anything so liable to loss and destruction as a slab of stone of so comparatively small a size as that indicated to me by the mohurir. It remains to be seen whether the said inscription can be corroborated by any of those I have copied. If

not, I should disregard it altogether. If the characters which form the inscriptions I have copied, were compared with Prinsep's Tables, I think they would be found similar to those in use about the 9th or 10th centuries of our era. But the inscriptions do not necessarily fix the age of the temple, unless the substance of what is inscribed, specially points to their being coeval: and it appears to be as great a fallacy to suppose that the ages of ancient inscriptions can be determined from the particular forms of their characters. (See Mr. Ottley's paper in the *Archæologia*, Vol. XXVI., on an ancient MS. of Aratus.) Therefore until all the inscriptions I have sent to the Society have been deciphered, it will be impossible to say whether there exists any reliable evidence as to the age of these excavations; but most undoubtedly it may be said that they are of great antiquity.

It will be observed that up to this point, I have been speaking of the excavations as "a temple," but this term is probably open to objection as not being indicative of their true and original character. This may be: but it must be borne in mind that I have been speaking of them heretofore as judged by present appearances.

I venture no opinion as to whether it is a Brahmanical or Buddhist excavation. The evidence that meets one's eye now in viewing what remains, shows that it has been used, latterly at all events, as a Sivite place of worship. If, therefore, any portion of it was originally Buddhist, all that was characteristic in it of the temples of that religion was no doubt designedly got rid of by the usurping sect. In the cells of the lower temple, I found no lingams. In the centre of each though, there was a rock-cut plinth, on which the lingam might possibly have been placed. But of course it might as well have borne any other object of adoration, either Sivite or Buddhist, to suit the views of the party in possession. I do not remember seeing a single rock-cut plinth in the cells surrounding the hall. Each of these cells contained a lingam, but the pedestals on which they rested were cut out of stone that was foreign to the locality. These cells may therefore at one time have been used as dormitories.

Possibly then the Harchoka excavation was originally a temple and monastery combined, and in the arrangement and variety of its several parts was, for an excavated structure, probably as complete for the purposes for which it was designed, as I believe it to be, in the above respects, unique.

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References to the plan of the Harchoka Excavations.

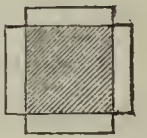
A. Access to the temple is gained by these two flights of steps, one being on the north side, and the other on the east.

B. These are niches in the rock, situated near the entrances, and about level with a man's breast. They probably held some image or symbol, that was the first object of adoration to the votaries of the temple.

C. A ledge of rock 3 feet high, forming a pedestal for two stone figures of bulls, couchant.

D. Cells or shrines. Excepting those in the lower temple, they each contain the symbol of the lingam.

E. Pillars of solid rock. The base and capital of the hall pillars are both alike in size and form, and shaped thus—
The shaft is square, the central part being reduced to an octagonal form by chamfering the angles. There is a feeble imitation of longitudinal beams resting on the pillars, consisting of a band of rock, of the same breadth as the pillar, projecting about an inch or so below the level of the roof.



F. This has been a square plinth of rock standing about 3 feet high with columns at the corners supporting the roof. From there being a shallow oval-shaped basin or hollow in the centre, I conclude that this was an altar for bloody sacrifices.

G. Sanctuaries. These recesses have a ledge (*g*) about 8 or 9 inches high projecting from the base of the wall, and of a trough-like shape in front. On these ledges, the principal deities of the temple were probably placed, the trough being doubtless made to prevent the water and oil used in the bathing and anointing of the images from spreading and soiling the place. From concluding that these were the receptacles of the principal images, I have called them *sanctuaries*, though want-

ing in the privacy essential to the priest in the performance of the sacrifice, which is ordinarily performed with closed door. But this privacy might have been obtained by putting up a purdah, or screen; an expedient of which we have a notable instance in the veiling off of the sanctuary of the tabernacle with a curtain or veil.

H. and J. These portions were so much split up and worn away that I cannot well conjecture to what uses they could possibly have been put. I, however, hazard the suggestion that, from having been, to all appearances, plain surfaces raised but a foot or two above the floor, they were used as sleeping places by the priests and servants of the temple.

K. and L. Porches. The Porch K has a low parapet on three sides for the purpose of keeping out the water that would wash past it on its way to the channel at M. The Porch L has a raised floor, and a rock-cut bench between the two pillars at the back.

M. An outlet for the water that would necessarily collect in the courts and passages after any rainfall; the outlet being connected with an excavated drain, which, at a distance of 4 or 5 paces from the temple, branches off both to the right and left, and discharges its contents into either the nallah or river, according to the channel it takes. These drains were probably covered over so as to effect the more rapid discharge of the temple drainage.

N. Remains of some large image which has been injured beyond identification.

O. Remains of a large image of Ganesh.

P. Sculptured figures, said to be images of Vishnu.

∴ The sculptures N, O, and P, are all cut out on the rock wall in relief.

On slabs of stone lying here and there within the temple were sculptured images which were known to the most intelligent Hindus in my own camp and the camps of the native chiefs in attendance on me, as representations of the following deities :

Durga,	One image.
Mahadeo, with serpent and trident,	Two images.
Durga riding in 5 different fashions,	{ Slab measuring 4 feet by 2 feet.
Durga riding on a lion with spear in hand,	One image.

Mahadeo and Parbati (Durga) seated together on a bull, } One image.

There were a few others which none of the people could identify.

The lower figure on pl. ix. represents the device mentioned in the Proceedings, Asiatic Society, Bengal, for 1871, p. 237.

NOTE.—The Chief of Chang-Bhokár informed me that there were other excavations in Chang-Bhokár near the villages of Chataunrá, Gur, Ghagra, and Kanjia, but none of them so extensive as the Harchoka one; and he seemed to think that others would be found in the jungles of Chang-Bhokár if search and enquiry were made. In Singraulí of Rewah, besides the extensive excavations at Mára and Deykah* which I visited, I am told that there are others at Lilaur near Saipúr.

* See, Vol. VII, Asiatic Researches.
